



EGYPT VIII. EGYPTIAN CULTURAL INFLUENCE IN PERSIA, MODERN TIMES

EGYPT

viii. Egyptian cultural influence in Persia, modern times

Egypt, together with Turkey and the Caucasus, was one of the major sources of cultural and political influences in Persia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Egypt became acquainted with Western culture from the early 19th century following Napoleon's invasion and the brief French rule (1798-1801), after which Moḥammad 'Alī's (1805-1848) Western-inspired reforms made Egypt an early conduit for passing some of the features of Western civilization to a number of Islamic countries. A factor that facilitated Egyptian influence in Persia was that the study of Arabic was a main element of traditional studies and therefore the majority of the educated class, trained mostly in the religious schools (*madrāsas*), were conversant with Arabic.

From the mid-19th century, Arab self-assertion leading to various forms of nationalism was in ferment in Egypt and steadily rising; consequently, Egyptian periodicals and newspapers were colored by it. Two literary and cultural journals, *Al-Helāl* and *al-Moqataṭaf*, which were founded by Lebanese Christians who had a Western orientation in terms of their aspirations and



outlook, were the two periodicals that were most appreciated in Persia, as was the newspaper *al-Ahrām* (see Hourani, 1962, p. 246; idem., 1991, p. 303 f., on these publications). They were read particularly by *madrassa* students, concerned clerics, and social reformists who were eager to know about progressive thought emanating from the West (see Taqizadeh, pp. 26, 29, 44; Kasravi, pp. 47). One may note that Sayyed Ḥasan Taqīzāda (q.v.), Aḥmad Kasrawī (q.v.) and ‘Alī Daštī (q.v.), were among those Persian political and cultural leaders who were exposed in their youth to Egyptian publications. Some of them even wrote articles for Egyptian periodicals (cf. Kasrawī, p. 141). Moḥammad ‘Abdoh (1849-1905), a disciple and collaborator of Sayyed Jamāl-al-Dīn Afḡānī (q.v., 1839-1897) had prompted a critical look at Islamic issues affecting the challenge presented by the West. Works of Jorjī Zaydān (1861-1914), founder of *al-Helāl*, Aḥmad Amīn (1879-1954), Tāhā Ḥosayn (1889-1973), and Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1899-?1987)—all of whom shared a belief in representative government and modernization of Islamic societies after European models, a program which was championed most energetically by the Wafd party—were particularly favored among the Persian intellectuals (see Hourani, 1962, index, on these figures and their ideas, particularly pp. 325 ff.). It is also most probable that the liberal attitude toward the status of women and their emancipation, present in the Constitutional movement of 1905-1911, was influenced by, among others, Qāsem Amīn (1865-1908), a student of ‘Abdoh, whose book on the emancipation of women, *Tahrīr al-mar’a*, aroused considerable controversy in Egypt (Hourani, 1962, p. 166).

In 1928, Ḥasan al-Bannā’ founded the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Eḡwān al-Moslemūn), a religious and political reform movement which sought the establishment of an Islamic government and the application of the *ṣarī’a* or Islamic holy law to all relevant issues (see EI2, III, pp. 1068-71 and Hourani, 1991, pp. 348 f.). The Brotherhood exerted considerable influence on some of the Islamic societies, and managed to check and occasionally force the retreat of the advocates of Western secular liberalism (Lapidus, pp. 626-27). The aims, ideology, and strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as those of the Muslim revolutionary Sayyed Qoṭb (d. 1966; Hourani, 1991, p. 398), who advocated the overthrow of the Egyptian and other Islamic governments, the excommunication of false Muslims, and “reconversion” of Egypt to Islam (Lapidus, pp. 634-36), had a marked impact on the radical ideology and militancy of the Devotees of Islam (*Fedā’iān-e Eslām*) and similar fundamentalist groups in Persia.



In the 1920s and 1930s, Egyptian music and films added a new dimension to Egyptian cultural impact. Records of Omm-Kolṭūm (ca. 1904-1975) and her contemporary singer ‘Abd-al-Wahhāb were popular in Persia as were Egyptian films, which often contained singing and dancing scenes with a good dose of Arabic popular songs. In fact, for a time some characteristic modulations of Arabic singing were being imitated by a number of singers. With the rise of Jamāl (Gamāl) ‘Abd-al-Nāṣer and the cessation of diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1960 following ideological differences, the Egyptian films and records ceased to be easily available in Persia and eventually the Egyptian musical influence ebbed, leaving only faint traces in the singing of some Persian vocalists. With the progress of modernization, the weakening of religious education, and with French and English gradually becoming the chief vehicles of reading Western works, the Egyptian influence, like that of Turkey, waned and finally disappeared.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798 – 1939*, London, 1962.

Idem., *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Cambridge (Mass), 1991.

A. Kasrawī, *Zendegānī-e man*, Los Angeles, 1990.

I. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge (England), 1988.

S. Ḥ. Taqīzāda, *Zendegī-e ṭūfānī. Kāterāt-e Sayyed Ḥasan-e Taqīzāda*, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1368 Š./1989.